

## **RECORDS AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES**

All governments, big and small, create and receive records and information. These records relate to the activities of the ministries and departments and include general correspondence, routine accounting papers, personnel material, and records relating to special projects, programmes, conferences, and seminars. All these records require a system of dealing with them and it is in this respect that records management has a vital role to play.

### **PURPOSE OF RECORDS MANAGEMENT**

The aim of records management is to ensure that records are created, used, stored and retired in an orderly and controlled manner.

The major objectives of records management are:

- To provide improved filing procedures so that related information can be filed together and thus retrieved with ease when required.
- To control the manner in which information is created and the way in which incoming and outgoing mail is received, processed, distributed, used and stored.
- To provide economical storage of information by identifying, scheduling and disposing of outdated information, thereby reducing capital and recurrent investment and expenditure in filing equipment and floor space.
- To identify and make appropriate arrangements for the custody and preservation of records that are vital to the organisation or have historical, research and other long-term value.
- To effect cost savings to the organisation through the control of the creation, distribution and retention of copies of reports, forms and other multiple documents.

## **RECORDS MANAGEMENT TERMINOLOGY**

- **Records** – any medium in or on which information is recorded. Medium includes paper, magnetic tape and disc, microfilm, audio-tape, film, slide, photograph.
- **Current records** – records which are in active use.
- **Semi-current records** – records whose use has declined and are used only from time to time. They are semi-active.
- **Non-current records** – records which are no longer in active use and are being kept in order to fulfill other secondary uses such as legal and audit requirements or for research value.
- **Archives** – records which are no longer used for day-to-day administration and are preserved for reference and research use. For a record to qualify as an archive it must have been deemed to have a lasting administrative and/or historical and reference value. Less than ten per cent of records have this value.
- **Public records and public archives** – records and archives generated by central government, local authorities and parastatals. Such records are normally under the custodianship of a national archives. Records of companies, churches, non-governmental organisations and individuals are referred to as private archives.
- **Life-cycle concept.** Each record has a life which is characterised by creation, usage, storage and eventual retirement through destruction or preservation as an archive.

## **COMMON RECORDS MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS**

Antiquated and inadequate filing systems resulting in misfiling and failure to retrieve material.

Unsystematic opening and closure of files without predetermined criteria resulting in inaccurate file titles and retention of information which is no longer required.

Inadequate circulation system resulting in slow circulation of information and failure to locate or pinpoint circulating files.

Lack of file retirement procedures resulting in haphazard transfers of records from records rooms to storerooms.

Lack of procedures for storage and retrieval of semi-current and non-current records resulting in failure to locate records stored in strong-rooms and store-rooms.

Organisations which do not have proper records management procedures lose money through:

- an unmanageable tangle of papers within the office;
- wasted clerical effort in search of information;
- loss of important operating information;
- extravagant use of high-cost office space and equipment;
- loss of vital records required for the legal and financial defence of the organisation.

## **RECORDS AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

There tends to be a distinction between what is said to be records management and what is information management. The former is seen as the management of manual systems while the latter is the management of automated or computerised systems. At the end of the day, however, both systems are dealing with information and an organisation wishing to computerise must have as its starting point the proper organisation and streamlining of the records management system. A good records management programme ensures that the right amount of information reaches the right person at the right time and in the right form. It further ensures that vital and valuable records can be identified and preserved as necessary.